

# Ice Fishing winter safety

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Picture this: A misty white view of frozen Canandaigua Lake accompanied by the cold chill of a winter morning. The snow-covered ice makes an eerie crunch noise beneath each step. A seasoned ice fisherman leads a novice out on the ice to experience this winter activity firsthand.

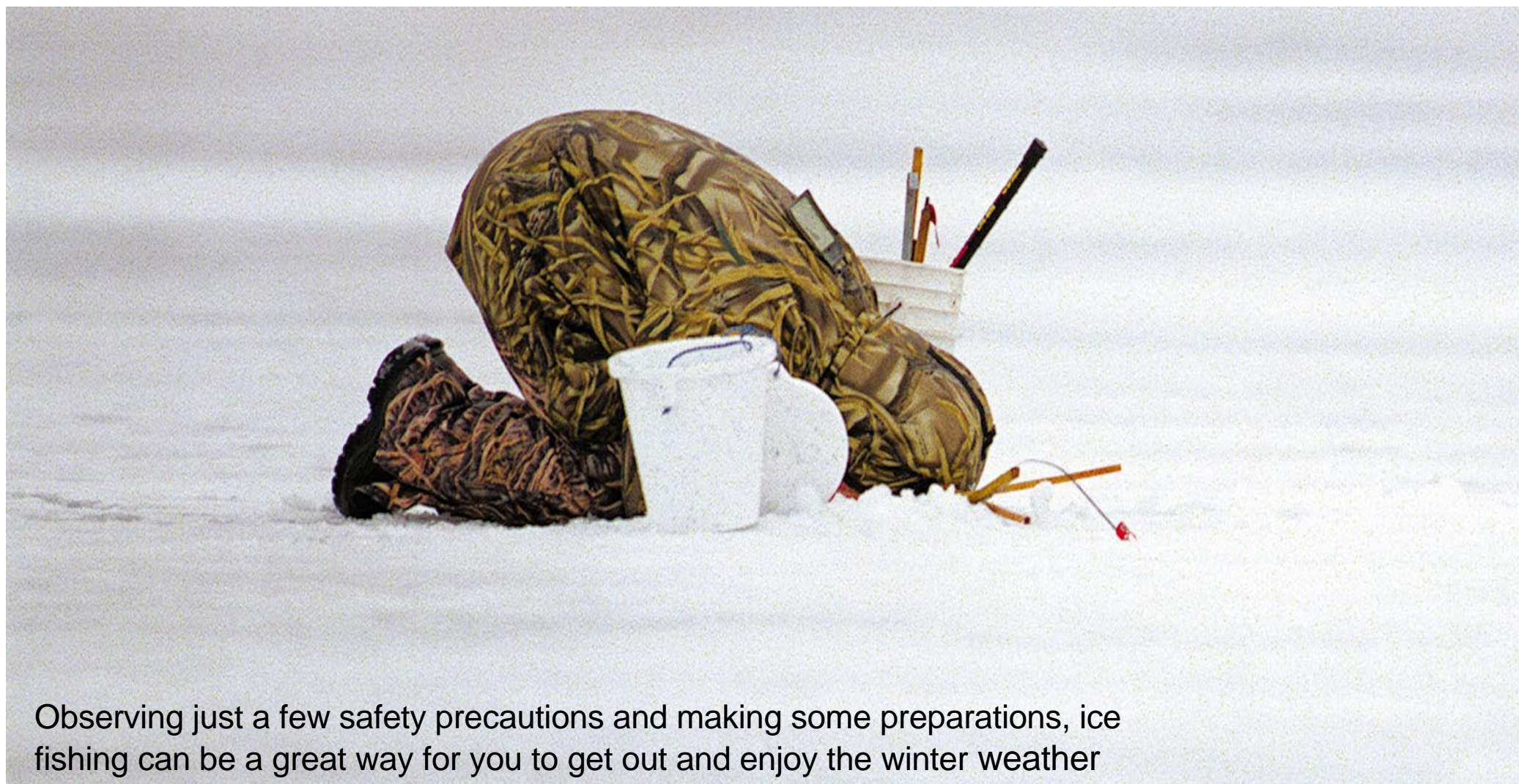
For those looking for the peaceful solace of this incredible sport, there are some safety precautions to think about before walking out on the ice. Regardless of the amount of experience someone has, safety is always a priority on the ice.

The number one concern is the ice's condition. Many factors affect the ice's thickness, and more importantly, its weight bearing capacity. Some of these factors are

temperature, air bubbles or pockets, and water conditions under the surface. Knowing what the air temperatures were the preceding 2 or 3 days before you fish are just as important as the temperature the day you fish. If the temperature is above freezing for 24 hours prior to your trip out on the ice, it may not be safe. Additionally, large drops in temperature are equally







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problematic because it makes the ice brittle.

For example, ice that appears blue or clear is stronger than milky looking ice. The milky look is caused by tiny air bubbles which significantly weakens the ice.

Large snowfalls are also a concern because they make the ice bow under the snow's weight and this causes slush to form on top. If you see slush, you should never go out on the ice until it completely refreezes.

Finally, running water under the ice's surface weakens it as well. If you're not sure how thick the ice should be to support your weight, there are several web sites with helpful charts like the one run by the New York

Department of Environmental Conservation. It has a wealth of information about ice fishing including an "Ice Thickness Table."

For example, one person can walk on ice that's 2 inches thick if it's clear, blue, hard, and on a lake versus a stream. In contrast, a 2-ton car can safely drive on 7 inches of ice with the same conditions. So how do you find out how thick the ice is where you want to fish? One of the best sources is your local bait shop. Many post ice thickness conditions. You also can check it yourself using an auger or pick. Make sure you check about every 150 feet or so since conditions can change quickly.

Besides ice thickness and condition, you also must consider the weather's effect on your body. It's paramount that you dress warm and wear waterproof clothing if possible. You must also consider what type of clothing will keep you afloat should the worst happen, and you fall through the ice. Waders and hip boots are a no-no, and you should always wear a personal flotation device. Clothing is not the only thing you can use to protect yourself from the weather. Many use portable "ice shanty" huts that keep you shielded from the elements.

Ice fishing tends to be a place of refuge for most of its faithful participants — a much

needed break from our hectic day-to-day work pace. Observing just a few safety precautions and making some preparations, ice fishing can be a great way for you to get out and enjoy the winter weather. ►

**Editor's note:** For more information on ice fishing safety, check out one of the following web sites: <http://www.dec.state.ny.us/website/dfwmr/fish/icefish.html#theice> or [http://www.crrrel.usace.army.mil/ierd/ice\\_safety/safety.html](http://www.crrrel.usace.army.mil/ierd/ice_safety/safety.html)

